DEATH

764
765 Throughout the Caucasus, the dead were held in high regard, and the funeral and memorial customs were quite elaborate. More or less ubiquitous features were wailing-women who wept not only over the deceased, but also over his clothing and arms, scratching their faces and tearing out their hair; further, funeral receptions, and a number of memorial repasts (among the Khevsur up to twelve) held at different intervals after the death, among the mountaineers usually accompanied by various contests on horseback. Among the mountaineers, in spite of the general spread of Christianity or Islam, many features of the pagan past survived, among others the [775] belief that the deceased had to make a long trip to the other world, that over there he needed food, his horse, the care of his wife, etc. The horse of the deceased played an important role in the funeral rites; among the Khevsur it was further cared for by a relative for the benefit of the deceased. Food and sometimes weapons were buried along with the dead; among the Circassians his wife would serve a portion for him at meals for a year; and the Ossetian widow for the same period would bring food to the grave of her husband every Friday, besides numerous other observances.

771 their deities, their ways of worship and their
177 festivals, shows clearly that it is a rather sober and primitive pagan religion with a thin surface of a few superficially adopted features of Christianity and Islam. It is most significant, that it is almost entirely devoid of the conception and the worship of God as a Supreme Being, and that only guardian spirits are invoked to grant protection, happiness and prosperity. It is moreover noteworthy that in this religion of tribes of Iranian origin, who have preserved a richly developed Iranian language partly archaic in character, there are to be found scarcely any distinct traits of an older form of Iranian religion. On the other hand, it can be stated that some of the characteristic conceptions of the Ossetic religion are similar to those of the religions of neighboring Caucasian tribes.

769 An essential part of any religious belief
775 is represented by the conception of death and the fate of the soul in the life to come. We have already mentioned that the soul of the deceased continues its existence as the guardian spirit of its former family. He takes care of the well-being of the family, and according to an old custom, the Ossets twice a year arrange a feast in the woods in honor of the spirit, which is accompanied by the offering of food and drink. They believe that at the time when a
761 person is sick, a tribunal of six men is formed in Heaven to decide whether this person should die. If the decision is in the affirmative, death

C. O. [764] 775 appears in the shape of a wolf, and the sick person dies. As long as the body lies in the house, the soul hovers over it. But immediately after burial, it re-enters the body, which then rises up three times in the grave. Thereafter, the soul flies up to Heaven, and there is has to fly through seven circles, until it is received by the Barastyr, the lord of the realm of the dead, who sends it either to Paradise (dzänät) or to Hell (zyndon). In the world of the dead, souls again assume the shape of human beings, live and grow old like human beings. But when they reach old age, they are rejuvenated by eating the flesh of the dragon Ruimon who was born blind on the earth and frightens human beings by roaring and makes them die. It is Vatsilla, Saint Elijah, who saves them by letting down a chain, binding him and pulling him up, whereupon the spirits in Heaven hack pieces of flesh from his body and distribute them among the dead.

There is a judge functioning in the world of the dead, whose name is said to be Aminon. At the bridge where its fate is decided, he asks the soul about the good and evil deeds it has done and shows the good soul the way to Paradise, whereas the evil soul is sent to Hell.

C. O. 773 It seems appropriate in this context to mention the Ossetic legends which describe and extol the wonderful deeds of the Narti, a tribe of mighty heroes, who fight innumerable

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587 (4) We must disagree with Kovalevskij in his interpretation of the levirate as a vestige of former group marriage.[29] Without offering us any evidence, he takes up the theories of Morgan and Frazer and applies them to the Caucasus. Such an institution as "group marriage" exists nowhere in the world, and to imagine that it has ever existed is mere fancy. In an attempt to explain the origin of preferential mating in the Caucasus we should lay aside all guesswork [562] and study the culture before us. For example: the unbearably low position of the North Caucasian woman (*infra*, pp. 152—159) may have made her appear as inheritable chattel. After all, the family purchased her, paid a high price for her, and now she constitutes a part of the family property no less than do the horses, cows, and sheep. Moreover, as we have explained above (pp. 44 f), she is more than *ordinary* family property: she is the best family investment, for she is the "worker-producing" and especially the "boy-producing" organ on which depends the economic, religious, and social life of the family. This realization would only too naturally disincline the family to give her up after her husband's [591] death. As we shall see in the following chapter, mating is not a private affair; it is a strictly family affair, the prime purpose of marriage being the good of the family or sib. She, as it were, belongs more to the *family* that purchased her than to the individual member whose wife she is. Finally, if we consider the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian, and pre-Avestic religion of the mountaineers, we are almost forced to postulate such an institution as widow-inheritance. [725] The life beyond does not differ from the present, and consequently the departed will need his wife in the nether world just as much as in this life. (We shall have occasion to speak of posthumous marriages! Cf. *infra*, p. 85.) We shall even show that suttee was not unknown in North Caucasus (Cf. *infra*, [842] pp. 131 f). The wife therefore must remain in the family. Moreover, the deceased needs offspring, a large progeny, just as much after death as during life, for his happiness and honour in the other world depend upon the cult he receives from his descendents. The widow, therefore, must remain in the family and another member must "raise up seed for his brother" and "build up his brother's house." In other words, the levirate is not a survival of a *primitive* culture but rather an institution very intimately connected with the economic, social and religious life of a relatively highly developed culture such as that of pastoral peoples.

595 As a confirmation of what we have just now said about the origin of [842] Caucasian preferential mating, we wish to describe another institution, still found today in various parts of Caucasus, the so-called *snohačestvo*. A boy-child is married to an adult girl with whom the father may have sexual intercourse as freely as with his own wife. The father is considered as living in lawful concubinage with his son's wife and may do so until the child becomes of age. We wish to stress that this practice is a perfect parallel to widow inheritance. The father "must raise seed" for his son and "build up his house" till he is himself able to do so. The children born of this concubinage belong to the childhusband, sometimes half to him and half to the progenitor. This is

[29] Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, p. 181.